

BMTFedNewsletter

The 8th Annual
BMT Leadership Conference
3rd May 2012 –
Hilton Manchester Airport Hotel

This year's conference theme is
'Simplicity in Leadership'

For more details please [click here](#)

US BMT Leadership Conference and Workshop Days
13th & 14th June – Chicago, Illinois

For more details please [click here](#)

Behavioural Management Techniques (BMT) is a blend of applied behavioural science tools and project management skills. BMT is used to improve business and safety performance.

Behavioural Debt – *is your ego writing cheques your behaviour can't cash?*

by Denis O'Hora, PhD

Recently I caught up with a good friend who works as a software engineer who told me about Technical Debt. Technical Debt is a metaphor that was first suggested by Ward Cunningham, a pioneer in IT who developed the first Wiki among other accomplishments.

The idea behind Technical Debt is that as you produce software code, you do so under time and business pressures, with incomplete knowledge and a set of expectations that are particular to that time. For these reasons, whenever a piece of code is completed, there will remain issues that have not been solved and issues that will develop in the future. These issues will cost time and money to put right, a debt that must eventually be paid. Cunningham knew that a certain amount of technical debt was required in order to get the job done. However, the cost of dealing with such issues increases as time progresses, like interest on a debt and without continually revisiting and re-working (refactoring) the program to reduce such debt, eventually the cost of servicing the debt becomes too great and the program is effectively unusable. It is like we are spending all of our money paying down interest on the debt because it has gotten too big.

Can you see the costs of Behavioural Debt in your workplace?

Have you been living beyond your behavioural means?

When I heard of Technical Debt, it struck a chord with me. At work, we often generate Behavioural Debt for many of the same reasons that Technical Debt is generated. We develop policies and procedures that are the best we can do in the time available and those policies and procedures often have to change with the changing business environment. We are therefore always banking Behavioural Debt. Like Technical Debt, if we do this knowingly, then it allows to develop and test our policies and procedures. Why spend too long developing perfect procedures that are utterly unsuitable for the people in the organisation? Instead, we need to develop agreed practices quickly and get feedback early, so that we can adjust them to work for the people who will need to work to them. However, when Behavioural Debt builds and we don't know about it, it can bring the company to a standstill. We are stuck paying down the interest on our Behavioural Debt.

Closer to home, we can generate Behavioural Debt through commitment to tasks. Each task we agree to complete generates a little debt, and we will have to work it off. When we agree to complete tasks without considering how much time and effort it will take to complete them, we run the risk of living beyond our behavioural means. We end up missing payments on our Behavioural Debt, breaking commitments to others and becoming unreliable in their eyes.

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Trainers and Managers – consider this...

by Howard Lees

Imagine the workplace, your current one or a past one. There are happy people and unhappy people around, some people looking forward to walking in their house at the end of each day and some people are dreading it. There are people in the workplace who are happy and confident and others unhappy and distracted.



Old, young, male, female, senior, junior, passenger, sunflower, contented, happy, stressed, loaded down with problems and distractions, perfectly calm, interested, disinterested. When you look at your workplace, take a moment to think to yourself “*who are these people?*” Each person in turn has a story, you don’t know their story, they do. You don’t know what, if anything, is bothering them today, they do.

So you are embarking on a new initiative, you are all fired up, you have your presentation all sorted, you are looking for 100% support and commitment from everyone else, and you want 100% of everyone’s attention. From your perspective, you have created a great environment for success. What does it look like from the perspective of each of the other team members?



While delivering our courses we encounter some people who clearly have problems/distractions. You can tell a mile off that they are consumed with some problem or other. You don’t necessarily want to explore why their behaviour is odd, after all, you are just a teacher teaching a short course. Their problems are obvious and can be easily witnessed at each module and in their writings on their ‘on-line’ coursework. You look at the other people on the course when odd things are said and no-one else seems to react. Take a look around, someone probably has a problem, they may or may not need help. It may be caused by you.

A beautiful conceit

by Howard Lees

There are people out there that are not happy with simple solutions, they want complexity, they are saying “*I have problems, I am clever, therefore my problems must be complex, therefore the solutions to my problems must also be complex.*” We receive a considerable amount of feedback during our courses, I get sent articles, presentations, various wares of management consultants from competent to baffling. I am sure of one thing, if something is presented in a way that is simple enough for me to understand, then there is a good chance I can understand it.

We are also sent many examples of problems, personal problems, organisational problems, communication problems. I have to say the vast majority are not complex, most of the problems and the solutions are simple to fix, the simple solution is usually unacceptable to one or more of the cast of characters involved. I am generous and would say that organisations don’t deliberately set out to make things problematic and unenjoyable but it’s very common for organisations to favour activities which support ‘loss aversion’ rather than ‘wealth creation’.

The downstream effect of a ‘loss aversion’ focus creates a culture where intelligent energetic people are checking expense claims, insisting on trailing measures (like AFR) and focus on presenteeism. The downstream effect of a ‘wealth creation’ focus delivers people who seek out leading measures (‘man days without injury’ rather than AFR), gather data on effectiveness of meetings and basic communication skills. A wealth creation culture is open, honest and simple. A loss aversion culture is by definition complex and of course perfectly designed to get more and more complex as this culture will create behaviours aligned with avoidance, excuses, blame and stress. Which in turn delivers increasing amounts of aversive demands for more and more information, more and more often, in more and more detail.

Take a look around at those people demanding complex solutions, “*I am clever therefore my solutions must be complex*” – it’s a beautiful conceit.